

THE CAROLINA SPARTAN.

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BLACK THURSDAY.

As the voyager approaches the shores of Victoria, the first promontory of Cape Otway, it is at night, the blaze from the light-house on its southern point sends him its cheering welcome for many a league across the ocean which he has so long traversed in expectation, and calls forth rapturous hurrahs from the throng of passengers who crowd to the fore-castle. If it be day, the eye rests on its lofty forest hills with a quiet and singular delight. These heights fully respond to the ideal of a new land only recently peopled. Clothed with forests from the margin of the sea to their very summits, they realize vividly the approach to a vast region of primeval nature. The tall white stems of the gum-trees stand thickly side by side like so many heavy columns; and here and there among them descend dark ravines, while piles of rocks on the heights, alternating with jagged chains and projecting spurs of the mountains, present their solitary masses to the breeze of ocean.

Amongst the rocks of this wild shore there are sea-caves of vast extent and solemn aspect, which have never yet been thoroughly explored. The forest, extending fifty miles or more in all directions, is one of the most dense and savage in the whole colony. Until lately it was almost impassable from the density of the scrub, and from the masses of vines, (that is, albinos or creeping coral like plants, chiefly parasitical), which, as in the forests of South America, climb from tree to tree, knitting the woods into an obscure and impenetrable shade. Expecting along the track from Mr. Roadknight's station, near the sources of the Barwar, through the heart of the forest to Apollo Bay, a distance of forty miles, you might get your way with an axe, but would find it difficult to make progress otherwise. The greater part of the promontory—consisting of steep hills covered with gigantic trees intersected by shelving valleys, and dark with congregated ferns, beetles, precipices, and stony declivities—affords no food for cattle. In one day, however, known to the colonists as Black Thursday, a hurricane of flame opened its rancid and impenetrable wilderness to the foot of man, but presented him at the same with a black and blasted chaos of charred trees and gigantic fallen trunks and branches.

It was in this forest, in the early morning of this memorable day, the sixth of February, eighteen hundred and fifty-one, that a young man opened his eyes and sat up to look about him. He had, the day before, driven a herd of fifty bullocks from the station of Mr. Roadknight thus far on his way towards his own residence in the country between Lake Corangamite and Mount Gellibrand. He had reached at evening a small grassy valley in the outskirts of the forest, watered by a creek falling into the western Barwar, and had there paused for the night. His mob of cattle, tired and hungry, were not inclined to stray from the rich pasturage before them; and, hobbling on their splendid black horse Sorcerer, he prepared to pass the night in the simple fashion of the settler on such journeys. A fallen log supplied him with a convenient seat, a fire was quickly lit from the dead boughs which lay plentifully around, and his quart cup, replenished at the creek, was soon hissing and bubbling with its side thrust into the glowing fire. He had a good store of kangaroo sandwiches, and there he sat with his cup of strong bush-tea—looking alternately at the grazing cattle, and into the solemn, gloomy, and soundless woods, in which even the laughing ja-kass failed to shout his clamorous adieu to the falling day. Only the distant monotone of the mowpork—the nocturnal cuckoo of the Australian wilds—reached his ear, making the profound solitude still more solitary. He very soon rolled himself in his travelling-rug, and flung himself down before the fire—having previously piled a fresh supply of timber upon it—near where his favorite dog lay, and where Sorcerer, in the trusty fashion of the bush-horse, slept as he stood.

The morning was hushed and breathless. Instead of that bracing chill, with which the Australian lodger out of doors generally wakes up, Robert Patterson found the perspiration standing thick on his face, and he felt a strange longing for a deep breath of fresh air. But motion there was none, except in the little creek which trickled with a fresh and inviting aspect at a few yards from him. He arose, and stripping, plunged into the deepest spot of it that he could find, and thus refreshed re-kindled his fire, and made his solitary breakfast. But all around him hung, as it were, a leaden and death-like heaviness. Not a bough nor a blade of grass was moved by the air. The trees stood inanimate, moody and sullen. He cast his eyes through the gloomy shadow beneath them, and a sultry suffocating density seemed to charge the atmosphere. The sky above him was dimmed by a grey haze.

"There is something in the wind to-day, old fellow," he said, addressing his horse in his usual way; for he had long looked on him as a companion, and firmly believ-

ed that he understood all that he said to him. "There is something in the wind; yet, where is the wind?"
The perspiration streamed from him with the mere exertion of saddling his horse, and as he mounted him to rouse up his cattle, horse, dogs, and cattle, manifested a listlessness that only an extraordinary condition of the atmosphere could produce. If you had seen the tall, handsome young man seated on his tall and noble horse, you would have felt that they were together formed for any exploit of strength and speed. But the whole troop—cattle, man, and horse—went slowly and soberly along, as if they were oppressed by a great fatigue or the extreme exhaustion of famine.

The forest closed in upon them again, and they proceeded along a narrow track, flanked on each side by tall and densely growing trees; the creeping vines making of the whole forest one intricate, impenetrable scene. All was hushed as at midnight. No bird enlivened the solitude by its cry, and they had left the little stream. Suddenly there came a puff of air, but it was like the air from the jaws of a furnace; hot, dry, withering in its very touch. The young settler looked quickly in the direction from which it came, and instantly shouted to the cattle before him, in a wild, abrupt, startling shout, swung aloft the stock whip which he held in his hand, and brought it down with the report of a pistol, and the sharp cut as with a knife, on the ear of the huge bullock just before him. The stock whip, with a handle about a half a yard in length and a thong of three yards long, of plaited bullock-hide, is a terrible instrument in the hands of a practised stockman. Its sound is a note of terror to the cattle—it is like the report of a blunderbuss, and the stockman at full gallop will hit any given spot on the beast that he is within reach of, and cut the piece clean away through the thickest hide that bull or bison ever wore. He will strike a fly on a spot of mud at full speed, and take away the skin with him, making the rosy blood spring into the wind, and the astonished animal dart forward as if mad.

Louder and louder, wilder and more fiercely, shouted the squatter, and dashed his horse forward over fallen trees, through crashing thickets, first on one side of the road, and then on the other. Crack, crack, went the stinging, slashing whip; loud was the bark of dogs; and the mob of cattle rushed forward at headlong speed. The young man gazed upwards; and, through the only narrow opening of the forest, saw strange volumes of smoke rolling southward. Hotter, hotter, stronger, and more steadily came the wind. He suddenly checked his horse, and listening, grew pale at the sound which reached him. It was a low deep roar, as of a wind in the deep top, or of a heavy waterfall, distant, and smothered in some deep ravine.

"God have mercy!" he exclaimed, "a bush fire! and in this thick forest!" Once more he sprang forward, shouting, thundering with his whip. He and the herd were galloping along the narrow wood track. But as he had turned westward in the direction of his home, the woods—of which he had before seen the boundary—now closed for some miles upon him; and as he could not turn right or left for the chaos of vines and scrub that obstructed the road, the idea of being overtaken there by the bush fire was horrible. Such an event would be death, and death only.

Therefore, he urged on his flying herd with desperation. Crack upon crack from his long whip, resounding through the hollow wood. The cattle themselves seemed to hear the ominous sound, and sniff the now aromatic perceptible smell of burning. The roar of the fire came louder, and ever and anon seemed to swell and surge as if urged on by a rough rising blast. The heat was fierce and suffocating. The young squatter's clothes hung to him with streaming perspiration. The horse and cattle steamed and smoked with boiling heat. Yet onward, urged they dashed with lolling tongues. Sorcerer, specked with patches of foam on his dark shining body, seemed to grow furiously impatient of the obstruction offered by the bullocks in his path. As his master's whip exploded on the flanks, he laid back his ears; and, with flaming eyeballs and bared teeth, strove to tear them in his rage.

Robert Patterson knew that the extraordinary heat and drought of the summer had scorched up the grass—the very ground had licked up the water from crannies, pools, and many a creek; had withered the herbage into crisp hay, and so withered the foliage, that you might crumble it between your fingers. The country appeared thoroughly prepared for a conflagration, and only required this fiery wind to send a blaze of extermination over the whole land. For weeks—nearly months—the shepherds and sawyers had spoken of fires burning in the hills; and in the fern tree breaks of this very forest he had been recently told that flames had been observed in various directions burning redly by night.

If the fire reached him and his herd before they escaped into the open plains, they must be consumed like stubble. The cattle began to show signs of exhaustion, hanging heavily; the perspiration on himself and horse was dried up by the awful heat; and the dogs ran silently, or only whining lowly to themselves, as they hunted every hollow in their way for water. Suddenly, they were out in an open plain, yet with the forest on either hand, but at a considerable distance.

What a scene! The woods were flaming and crackling in one illimitable conflagration. The wind, dashing from the north in gusts of inconceivable heat, seemed to send the very face and shrivel up the lungs. The fire leaped from tree to tree, flashing and roaring along with the speed and the destructiveness of lightning. The sere foliage seemed to snatch the fire, and to perch in it in a riot of demoniacal revelry. On it flew, fast as the fleetest horse could gallop; and consuming acres of leaves in a moment, still remained to rage and roar amongst the

branches and in the hollow stems of ancient trees. The whole wood on the left was an enormous region of intense flame, and that on the right sent forth the sounds of the same ravaging fires; but, being to windward, the flames could not be seen for the vast clouds of smoke, mingled with fiery sparks, which were rolled on the air. There was a sound as of thunder, mingled with the crash of falling trees, and the wild cries of legions of birds of all kinds, which fell scorched and blackened and dead to the ground.

Once out on this open plain, the cattle were speedily lost in the blinding ocean of smoke, and the young settler obliged to abandon them, made a dash onward for his life. Now the flames came racing along the grass with the speed of the wind, and moving all smooth as a pavement; now it tore furiously through some near point of the forest, and flung burning ashes and tangles of blazing bark upon the galloping rider. But Sorcerer, with an instinct more infallible than human sagacity, sped on, over thickets and stone, and fallen trees, snorting in the thick masses of smoke, and stretching forward his gasping jaws as if to catch every breath of air to sustain impeded respiration.

When the wind veered, the reek driven backward revealed a most amazing sight. The blazing skirts of the forest; huge isolated trees, standing tall—standing columns of fire; here a vast troop of wild horses with flying manes and tails, rushing with thundering hoofs over the plain; there herds of cattle running, with blood-hot eyes and hanging tongues, they knew not whither, from the forest; troops of kangaroos leaping frantically across the rider's path, their hair singed and giving out strongly the stench of fire; birds of all kinds and colors shrieking piteously as they drove wildly by, and yet saw no spot of safety; thousands of sheep, standing huddled in terror on the scorched flats, with singed wool, deserted by their shepherds, who had fled for their lives.

But onward flew the intrepid Sorcerer, onward stretched his rider, thinking lightning-winged thought of home, and of his helpless, prayed-for mother there. With a caution inspired by former outbreaks of bushfires, he had made at some distance round his homestead a bare circle. He had felled the forest trees, leaving only one here and there, at such distances that there was little fear of ignition. As the summer dried the grass, he had set fire to it on days when the wind was gentle enough to leave the flame at command, watching, branch in hand, to beat out any blaze that might have travelled into the forest. By this means he had hitherto prevented the fire from reaching his homestead; and he had strongly recommended the same plan to his neighbors, though generally with little effect. Now, the fire was so terrible, and sparks flew so wide on the wind, that he feared they might kindle the grass round his homestead, and that he might find everything and every person there consumed.

But, behold! the gleaming, wet, ome waters of Lake Gellibrand. Sorcerer rushed headlong towards it; and wading hastily up to his sides in its cooling flood, thrust his head to the eyes into it, and drank as if he could never be satisfied with less than the whole lake. Europeans, now to the scene, would have trembled for the horse; but the bush steed, knowing best what he needs, eats and drinks as likes him best, and flourishes on it. Smoking hot, the rider lets him drink his fill, and all goes well. The heat produces perspiration, and the evaporation cools and soothes him. Robert Patterson did not lose a moment in following Sorcerer's example. He flung himself headlong from the saddle, dressed as he was, dived, and splashed, and drank exuberantly. He held again and again his snarling face and singed hands over the delicious water; then threw it over the steed, that now, satiated, stood panting in the flood. He laved and rubbed down the grateful animal with water after water, cleaning the dried perspiration from every pore, giving him refreshment at every pore. Then up and away again.

He had not ridden two hundred yards before he saw, lying on the plain, a horse that had fallen in saddle and bridle, and lay with his legs under him, and head stretched stiffly forward, with glaring eyeballs, but dead. Near him was a man, alive, but sunk in water, and with a sound. Robert Patterson comprehended his need; and, running to the lake, brought his pannikin full of water, and put it to his mouth. It was the water of life to him. His voice and some degree of strength came quickly back. He had come from the north, and had ridden a race with the fire, till horse and man had dropped here, the horse never to rise again. But Patterson's need was too urgent for delay. He found the man had no lack of provisions; he carried him in his arms to the margin of the lake, mounted, and rode on.

As he galloped forward, it was still fire—fire everywhere. He felt convinced that the conflagration—fanned by the strong wind, and acting upon fires in a hundred quarters—extended over the whole sun-dried colony.

It was still early noon, when, with straining eyes, and a heart which seemed almost to stand still with a terrible anxiety, he came near his own home. He darted over the brow of a hill—there it lay safe! The circle within his cleared boundary was untouched by the fire. There were his paddocks, his cattle, his huts, and home. With a lightning thought his thanks flew up to Heaven, and he was the next moment at his door, in his house, in his mother's arms. Robert's anxiety had been great for the safety of his mother—her anxiety was triple for him. Terror occasioned by a former conflagration had paralyzed her lower extremities, and now, the idea of her only son, her only remaining relative in the colony, being met by this unexpected fire in the dense deluges of the Otway Forest, kept her

in a state of the most fearful tension of mind. Mrs. Patterson, though confined to her wheeled chair, was a woman of pre-eminent energy and ability. Left with her boy a mere infant, she had managed all her affairs with a skill and discretion that had produced great prosperity. Though her heart was kind, her word was law; and there was no man on her run who dared in the slightest to disobey her, nor one within the whole country round who did not respect and revere her. She had been a remarkably handsome woman. The whole of the floors of the station being built upon one level, in her wheeled chair she could be at any moment in any part of the house or premises.

The moment the first joy of mother and son was over, what a scene presented itself! The station was like a fair. From the whole country round people had fled from the fire, and had instinctively fled there. There was a feeling that the Patterson precautions, which they themselves had neglected, were the guarantees of safety. Thither shepherds had driven their flocks, stockmen their herds, and whole families, compelled to flee from their burning houses, had hurried thither with the few effects that they could snatch up and bear with them. Patterson's paddocks were crowded with horses and cattle; the bush round his station was literally hidden beneath his own and his neighbors' flocks. Stockmen, shepherds, substantial squatters, now homeless men, were in the throng. Families, with troops of children, had encamped in the open ground near his house, beneath temporary tents of sheets and blankets. His house was crammed with fugitives; and was one scene of crowding, confusion and sorrow. Luckily the Patterson store-room was well-stocked with flour, and there could be no want of meat with all these flocks and herds about them. But for the cattle themselves there must soon be a famine; and the moment that the fire abated, scouts must be sent off in all directions, and especially to the high plains around Lake Corangamite—in search of temporary pasture. Meantime, fires were lighted in a dozen places, and frying-pans and kettles fully employed—for, spite of flight, and loss, and grief, hunger, as Homer thousands of years ago asserted, is impatient, and will be fed.

The stories that the people had to tell were most melancholy—houses burnt down, flocks destroyed, children suffocated in the smoke or lost in the rapid flight, shepherds and bullock-drivers consumed with their cattle. Numbers had fled to creeks and pools, and yet had been severely burnt—the flames diving over the surface of the water with devouring force. Some had laid in shallow brooks, turning over and over, till finally forced to get up and fly. Still, as the day wore on, numbers came pouring in with fresh tales of horror and devastation. The whole country appeared to be the prey of the flames; and men who were, a few hours before, out of the reach of poverty or calamity, were now homeless paupers.

"The Maxwell's mother," Patterson asked—"is there any news of them?"
"None, my dear Robert, none," replied his mother. "I hope and believe that they are quite safe. They have long ago adopted your own plan of a clearance ring, and I doubt not as yet now as much a centre of refuge as we are."

"But I should like to be sure," said Robert, seriously. "I must ride over and see."
"Must you! I think you must not," said Mrs. Patterson. "But if you cannot be satisfied let some of the men go—there are plenty at hand, and you are already worn out with fatigue and excitement."
"No, I am quite well and fresh—I had rather go myself," said Robert; "it is not far." And he strode out, his mother saying—
"If you find all right, don't come back to-night."

Robert Patterson was soon mounted on a fresh and powerful horse, and cantered off towards Mount Hesse. It was only seven miles off. The hot north wind had ceased to blow; the air was cooler, and the fire in the forest were burning more tamely. Yet he had to ride over a track which showed him the ravages which the flames had made in his pleasant woods. The whole of the grass was annihilated; the dead timber lying on the ground was still burning, and huge hollow trees stood like great chimneys, with flames issuing from their tops as from a furnace, and a red, intense fire burning within their trunks below, and from them burning earthy matter came tumbling out smoking and rolling on the ground. He was about crossing a small creek, when he saw an Irishman—a shepherd of the Maxwell's—sitting on its banks. His clothes were nearly all consumed from his back—his hat was the merest remaining fragment, scorched and shrivelled. The man was rocking himself to and fro and groaning.

"Fehal!" exclaimed Patterson. "What has happened to you?"
The man turned upon him a visage that started him with terror. It was, indeed, no longer a human visage, but a scorched and swollen mass of deformity. The beard and hair were burnt away—eyes were not visible—the whole face being a confused heap of red flesh and hanging blisters. The poor fellow raised a pair of hands that displayed equally the dreadful works of the fire.

The young squatter exclaimed—"How dreadful! Let me help you, Fehal—let me take you home."
The man groaned again, and, opening his distorted mouth with difficulty, and with agony, said—
"I have no home—it is burnt."
"And your family?"
"Dead—all dead."
"But are you sure—are you quite sure?" said Robert, excitedly.
"I saw one—my eldest boy; he was lying burnt near the house. I lifted him, to carry him away, but he said, 'Lay me down, father—lay me down, I cannot bear it.' I laid him down, and asked, 'Where are the rest?' 'All fled into the bush,' he said, and then he died. They are all burnt."

Robert Patterson flung the wretched man a linen handkerchief, bidding him dip it in the creek and lay it on his face to keep the air from it and turned his horse, saying he would look for the family. He soon found the place where the hut had stood. It was burnt to ashes. On the ground, not far from it, lay the body of the dead little boy. Patterson hastened along the track of the old road to the Maxwell's station, tracing it as well as he could in the fire and the flaming branches. He felt sure that the flying family would take that way. In a few minutes it brought him again upon the creek by which the poor man sat, but lower down.

There stood a hut in a damp spot, which had been used years ago for the sheep washing, but had long been deserted. It was surrounded by thick wattles, still burning. The hut was on fire, but its rotten timbers forcing out far more smoke than flame. As he approached, he heard low cries and lamentations. "The family is fled thither," he said to himself, "and are perishing of suffocation." He sprang to the ground, and dashed forward through columns of heavy smoke. It was hopeless strength seemed to close his lungs, and water rushed from his eyes in torrents.

But pushing in, he seized the first living thing that he laid his hands on, and bore it away. It was a child. Again he made the desperate essay, and succeeded in bringing out no less than four children and the mother, who was sunk on the floor as dead, but who soon gave signs of life and returning consciousness.

The young man was now in the utmost perplexity with his charge. It was a heart-rending sight. The whole group were more or less hurt, but as it seemed to him, not so much hurt as to affect their lives. Their station was three miles distant, and he had no alternative but to leave them there till he rode and sent a cart for them. With much labor, carrying the children one after another in his arms, he conveyed the wretched group to the father.

As the young man stood bewildered by the cries and lamentations of the family on meeting the father, a horse, ridden by a lady, approached at a gallop. This apparition contrasted strangely with the lamentable group of sufferers. The young lady was tall and of a most beautiful figure, and was mounted on a fine bay horse. A light skirt and broad felt hat were all the deviations from her home costume that haste had led her to assume. Her face, fresh and rosy, full of youth, loveliness and feeling, was at the same time grave and anxious, as she gazed in speechless wonder on the group.

"Miss Maxwell!" Patterson exclaimed, "in the name of Heaven, what news! How is all at the Mount? Yet, on this dreadful day, what but all that can happen?"
"Nothing is amiss, that I know of," said the young lady. "We are all safe at home. The fire has not come near us."
"Thank God!" said Robert. "I was going to your house, when I fell in with this unfortunate family. Will you ride back and send us a cart?"
"But I beg you will come with me, for I, too, was going to you."
"To me?" cried the young man, in the utmost astonishment. "Then all is not right. Is George well?"
"I hope so," replied Miss Maxwell; but the tears started into her eyes at the same moment, and Robert Patterson gave a groan of apprehension.

"I hope so," added the young lady, recovering her self-possession; "but that is the point I want to ascertain. Yesterday, he went with Tureen into the hills to bring in the cattle, and this morning the fire surprised them when they had taken two different sweeps along the sides of a range. Tureen could not find George again, but made his way home, hoping his master had done the same. George has not yet come, and the fire is raging so fiercely in the hills, that I could think of nothing but coming to you for your advice and assistance."

"Thank you, Ellen," said Robert with a sad emotion. "I will find him if he be alive." He sprang upon his horse; and, telling the unhappy family that he would send immediate assistance, both he and Miss Maxwell galloped away.

We will not attempt to divulge their conversation on the way; but will let the reader a little into the mutual relations of these two families and these young people. Miss Ellen Maxwell and her brother George were the sole remaining members of the family. As the nearest neighbors of the Pattersons, they had grown into intimate friends. George and Robert had been playfellows in Van Dieman's Land; and here, where they had come in their boyhood, they were schoolfellows. Since then they had gradually grown, from a similarity of tastes and modes of life, the most intimate friends. It was not likely that Robert Patterson and Ellen Maxwell could avoid liking one another. They possessed everything in mind, person, and estate, which made such an attachment the most natural in the world. Ellen was extremely attached to Mrs. Patterson, for whom she had the highest veneration. Ellen had received an excellent education in Edinburgh, whither she had been sent to her friends. In her nature she was frank, joyous and affectionate, but not without a keen sense of womanly pride, which gave a certain dignity to her manner and a reputation for high spirits.

All had gone well between herself and Robert till some six months ago. But since then there sprang up a misunderstanding. Nobody could tell how it had arisen—nobody except Ellen knew, and whatever was the secret cause, she locked it impenetrably within her own bosom. All at once she had assumed a distant and haughty manner towards Robert Patterson. From him she did not conceal that she felt she had cause for her dissatisfaction, but she refused to explain. When, confounded at the circumstance, he sought for an explanation, she bade him search his own memory and

his heart, and they would instruct him. She insisted that they should cease to regard themselves as affianced, and only consented that nothing as yet should be said on the subject to her brother or Mrs. Patterson, on the ground that it would most painfully afflict them.

Ellen, who used to be continually riding over to see Mrs. Patterson with her brother, now rarely appeared, and proudly declined to give her reason for the change in her—adding that she must absent herself altogether if the subject were referred to. Her brother she was equally reserved, and he attributed it to caprice, bidding Robert to take no notice of it. Ellen was not without other admirers, but that was nothing new. One young man who had lately come into the neighborhood paid her assiduous attention, and gossip did not fail to attribute the cause of Robert Patterson's decline of favor to his influence. But Ellen gave no countenance to such a supposition. She was evidently under no desire to pique her old lover by any marked predilection for a new one. Her nature was too noble for the pettiness of coquetry, and any desire to add poignancy to coldness. On the other hand, it was clear to the quietly watchful eye of her brother that she was herself even more unhappy than Robert. Her eyes often betrayed the effects of secret weeping, and the paleness of her cheek belied the assumed air of cheerfulness she wore.

Things were in this uncomfortable state at the outbreak of the fire. It was therefore a most cheering thought to Patterson that, in her distress, she had first and foremost, to him, turned for aid. This demonstrated confidence in his friendship. True, on all occasions she had protested that her sense of his high moral character was not an iota abated; but, in this spontaneous act, Robert's heart persuaded himself that there lay something more.

No sooner did he reach the Mount, than, leaving Ellen to send off assistance to the Fehans, he took Tureen, the stockman, and rode into the forest hills. It was soon dark, and they had to halt; but not far from the spot where Tureen had lost sight of his master. They tethered their horses in a space clear of trees and fire, and gave them corn that they had brought with them. When the moon rose, they went on to some distance uttering loud coos to attract the ear of the lost man; but all in vain. The fire had left the ground hot and covered with ashes, and here and there huge trees burning like columns of red-hot iron.

Finding all their efforts for the night fruitless, they flung themselves down beside their horses; and with the earliest peep of dawn they were up and off higher into the hills. Their way presented at every step the shocking effects of the fire. Ever and anon they came upon bullocks, which had perished in it. Here and there, too, they descried the remains of kangaroos, opossums, and hundreds of birds, scorched and shrivelled into sable masses of sinew.

They came at length to the spot where Tureen and George Maxwell had perished; and the experienced bushman carefully sought out the tracks of the horses' feet, and followed them. These were either obliterated by the fire, or failed from the rocky hardness of the ground; but, by indefatigable search, they regained them, and were led at length to the edge of a deep and precipitous ravine. In the ravine itself the trees and grass remained unscathed; the torrent of fire had leaped over it, sweeping away, however, every shrub and blade of herb from the heights.

"God defend us!" exclaimed Robert; "the smoke must have blinded him, and concealed this frightful place. Man and horse are doubtless dashed to pieces."
He raised a loud and clear voice, instantly answered by the wild and clamorous barking of a dog, which, in the next instant, was seen leaping and springing about in the bottom of the dell, as if frantic with delight.

"That is Snitrup!" exclaimed Tureen; and the two men began to descend the steep side of the ravine. Robert Patterson outstripped his older and heavier companion. He seemed to fly down the sheer and crazy descent. Here he seized a bough, there a point of the rock, and, in the next instant, was as rapidly traversing the bottom of the gully. Snitrup, the little dog, rushed barking and whining upon him, as if in a fit of madness, and then bounded off before him. Robert followed in breathless anxiety, stopped the next moment by the sight of George Maxwell's horse lying crushed and dead. Robert cast a rapid glance around, expecting every moment to see his friend equally lifeless. But presently he heard the faint sound of a human voice.

There lay George, stretched in the midst of a grassy thicket, with a face expressing agony and exhaustion. Robert seized his offered hand, and George called first for water. His friend started up and ran down the valley at full speed. He was soon back with a panikin of water, which the sufferer drank with avidity.

He now learned that, as had been supposed, in the thick smoke, the horse had gone over the precipice, and was killed in an instant. George had escaped, his fall being broken by his steel, and he was flung back into the thicket, which again softened the shock of his descent. He had a broken leg, and was, as we have already said, extremely exhausted. Life, however, was strong within him; and Tureen and Robert lost no time in having a litter of poles bound together with strychny bark, made soft with grass and leaves, laid in a sheet of the same bark. They had three miles to bear the shattered patient, to whom every movement produced excruciating agonies. It was not long before they heard people in different parts of the wood loudly cooing; and their answers soon brought not only a number of men who had been sent out in quest of them, but also Miss Maxwell herself.

We shall not attempt to describe the sad and yet rejoicing interview of the brother and sister, nor the rapidity with which the different men were sent off upon the horses tied in the hills for the surgeon, who lived two miles off.

In a few days George Maxwell—his leg having been set and his wounds dressed—had become easy enough to relate all that had happened to him; the dreadful night which he had passed in extreme agony in the gully, and the excitement which the loud coos of Robert, which had reached him, but to which he was unable to reply, had occasioned both him and the faithful and sympathizing dog, who barked vehemently; but, as it proved, in vain.

From the moment of this tragic occurrence, Robert Patterson was constantly in attendance at the Mount on his friend. He slept in the same room with him, and attended by Ellen in the day-time. From this moment the cloud which so long hung over the spirit of Ellen Maxwell had vanished. She was herself again; always kind and open, yet with a mournful tone in her bearing with Robert, which surprised and yet pleased him. It looked like regret for past unkindness. As they sat one evening over their tea, while George was in a profound sleep in the next room, Ellen looking with emotion at him, said, in a low, tremulous voice, "Robert, I owe much to you."

"To me?" said Robert, hastily. "Isn't George as much a brother to me as to you?"
"It is not that which I mean," added Ellen, coloring deeply, yet speaking more firmly; "it is that I have done you a great wrong. I believed that you had said a most ungenerous thing, and I acted upon my belief with too much pride and resentment. I was told that you had jested at me as the daughter of a convict."
Robert sprang up. "It is false! I never said it," he exclaimed. "Who could tell you such a malicious falsehood?"

"Calm yourself," added Ellen, "I shall tell you all. Hear me patiently; for I must impress first on your strange likelihood of what was reported to me. You were driven to a stockman's hut, it was said, by a storm—your and a young friend. You were very merry, and this friend congratulated you in a sportive style on having won what he was pleased to call the richest young woman in the colony. And with a merry laugh you were made to add, and the daughter of the most illustrious of kings!"

Robert Patterson, with a calumny of concentrated wrath, asked in a low measured tone: "Who said that?"
"The woman whom you lately saved with all her family. It was Nelly Fehal."
"Nelly Fehal!" said Robert in amazement: "what have I ever done to her that deserved such a stab?"
"You threatened to send Fehal to prison for bush-rangin'. You reminded him of his former life and unexpired sentence."
"That is true," said Robert, after a pause of astonishment. "And this was the deadly revenge—the serpents! But, O Ellen! why could you not speak? One word, and all would have been explained."

"I could not speak, Robert. Wounded pride silenced me. But I have suffered severely; have been fearfully punished. I can only say—forgive me!"
One long embrace obliterated the past. The late Mr. Maxwell had been transported for the expression of his liberal political principles in a hard and bigoted time. There was not a man in a penal settlement who did not honor his political integrity and foresight; and who did not revere his character. But the convicts as a body were proud to claim him as one of their own; though sent thither only for the crime of Hampden or a Sidney. Whenever reproach was thrown on the convict section of society, the insulted party pointed to the venerable exile, and triumphantly hailed him as their chief. No endeavor, though they were many, and conducted by powerful hands, had ever been able to procure a reversal of his sentence. The injuries of a man of his high talents and noble nature might be comparatively buried at the antipodes; at home, they would be a present, a perpetual, and a damaging reproach. He had lived and died a banished, but slightly honored, man. Still, as he rose to a higher estimation and an unusual influence, there were little minds who delighted occasionally to whisper—"After all, he is but a lag." And it was on this tender point that the minds of his children, whose ears such remarks had reached and wounded, had become morbidly sensitive.

Amid the general enmity, this reconciliation was like a song of thanksgiving in the generous heart of Robert Patterson, and quickened it to tenfold exertions in alleviating the sufferings of his neighbors. His joy was made loneliness and overflowing by a circumstance which appeared to be little short of a miracle. When Robert rode up to his own station, he beheld his mother, not seated in her wheeled chair—but on foot, light, active, and alert, going to and fro amongst the people whose destitution still kept them near his house. The name of misery she still saw around her, and the exertions which it stimulated, but the paralytic bonds which had enchaind her for years. The same cause which had disabled her limbs had restored them.

The conflagration had extended over a space of three hundred miles by a hundred and fifty; and far away beyond the Gouburn, the Broken River, and the Owens, we have witnessed the remaining traces of its desolation. Over all this space, flocks and herds in thousands had perished. Houses, racks, fences, and bridges had been annihilated. Whole families had been destroyed. Solitary men, straggling through the loneliness woods before the surging flame, had fallen and perished. For weeks and months, till the kindly rains of autumn had renewed the grass, people journeying through the bush beheld leas and famishing cattle, unable to rise from the ground, and which by faint howlings seemed to elicit the pity and aid of man. Perhaps no such vast devastation ever fell on any nation; and the memory of Black Thursday is an indelible retrospect in Victoria.